

# John Stargu

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## B-24 LIBERATOR ENGINEER/TOP TURRET GUNNER 726th BOMBER SQUADRON / 451st BOMBARDMENT GROUP USAAF

Born in Clayton, N.J. on Feb. 29, 1924, John Stargu was the son of the late George and Despina (Moshovos) Stargu. According to his son, Nick, the original name was Stergiou but the authorities in Ellis Island wrote it as Stargu. George's heritage was from Mykonos Island while Despina was from Samos Island, both in the Aegean Archipelago. John graduated from Bloomfield High School and was employed by Danaher Ford and M&E Ford. During WWII he enlisted in the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) and trained as a Flight Engineer and Top turret gunner in the B-24 Liberators. He met his crew during their joint training in Pueblo Air Force Base in Colorado, in January 1943, his captain was Robert Blair. One interesting note is that the crew's tail gunner was named Vlachos, almost certainly another Greek American. When their training was over, they were assigned for service in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO) specifically the 451st Bomb Group, based in Italy. The whole crew went to Herrington in Kansas in order to deliver a new bomber equipped with radar.

According to Blair before their journey to Europe, the bombardier and three gunners were sent by boat. At the same time, the rest of the crew along with two radar engineers and spare parts, however when they arrived in Italy, they never heard again from them and got replacements. That leads us to the conclusion that Stargu was onboard the bomber during the transatlantic flight, considering the fact that he was also the flight engineer. Also, Vlachos most probably transferred to another crew (research about him is on the tracks). Blair and Stargu along with what was left from the original crew were probably the first replacement crew for the 451st BG. And while they were preparing for their first missions, they "lost" their navigator too. John and Blair began flying with various squadron members and when they got their permanent crew, they already had many missions under their belt. Actually, Blair had a few missions left before rotating back home (he had 30 missions), while the Greek American engineer and top turret gunner finished the war with 50 missions flying with other crews also. Blair and Stargu flew whatever bomber was available and usually, every bomber other crews didn't want, adding to the fact that they were new in the Group. However, Blair's mission list shows that the first eight missions were flown in the B-24H-1-FO 42-7687, G/48 "THE STORK" and with it they flew many memorable missions, especially over Romania and Greece. Blair remembered such a mission against Garana, Rumania, on June 11, 1944.

*"We had lost an engine and two superchargers and with the old...and gas burner for a plane we knew we could not keep up and or get up to altitude. As we turned back over the border in Romania, we had to get rid of bombs before we crossed back into Yugoslavia. The bombardier made a quick bomb run on some barges in Danube and just as we let them go, we got hit by flak. At first, I thought we were on fire, but it turned out to be just dust as we had been in the mud in Southern Italy before moving up near Foggia. It was so muddy that the planes would not sit at the nose wheel but on the tail. Anyway, as soon as we got hit, we took evasive action and came down on the deck on the way home. We were weaving at all the peasants, and they were waving back. By the way, the bombardier dropped the bombs safely as he forgot to arm them. When we came to land, I could not get the nose up and I had to ... for the co-pilot to help me. We found out later that many of the control cables had been cut and we had many holes besides, the big one on the elevator."*

In another mission over Greece Stargu remembered.

*"I flew over Greece which was occupied by Germany. There were all these anti-aircraft guns firing and I say to them. Hey, I'm Greek. We were very lucky. Nobody in our plane got injured."*

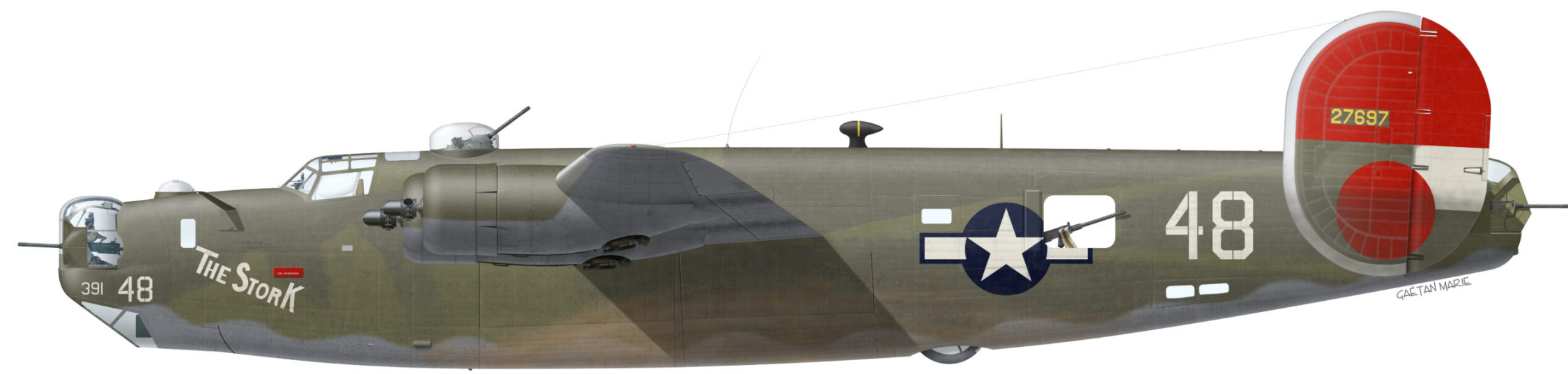
After the war John got married to his sweetheart, Mary Covras, also a Greek American, and was blessed with a daughter and two sons, Despina, Takis, and Nick. He was employed by Danaher Ford and M&E Ford, and he was a member of the St. George Greek Orthodox Church in New Britain. He was also a member of the choir and was a past President of the Meriden AHEPA. Lastly, he was an active member of a group composed of the 451st BG which preserved their service history. John Stargu left us on Saturday, April 7, 2018, at Masonicare after a brief illness.



John Stargu sitting on his top turret gunner, onboard "THE STORK". (Nick Stargu Archive)



Robert Blair crew during their training in Colorado. John kneeling third from the left. On his right, there is another Greek American, Vlachos. He was a tall gunner. (Nick Stargu Archive)



B-24H-1-FO 42-7687 "THE STORK" of 726thBS/451st BG was based in Castelluccio, Italy in the summer of 1944. Blair and Stargu possibly flew more than 16 missions together. When Blair completed his 30 missions John remained in Italy completing 20 more missions before returning back to the United States. We don't know if he kept flying with "THE STORK". This aircraft was among the first production batch of B-24s built by Ford at Willow Run. The aircraft's electrically-driven Emerson nose turret was preferred by frontline units over the standard hydraulically-driven Consolidated version due to the former unit's increased rate of rotation. The H-model was consistently modified during its production run. (Profile by Bertrand Brown, further information from Robert F. Dorr)

### JOHN STARGU PHOTOS



John Stargu and Mary Covras, also a Greek American, May 1945. (Nick Stargu Archive)



John Stargu poses in the cockpit of a B-24, Italy, June 1944. (Nick Stargu Archive)



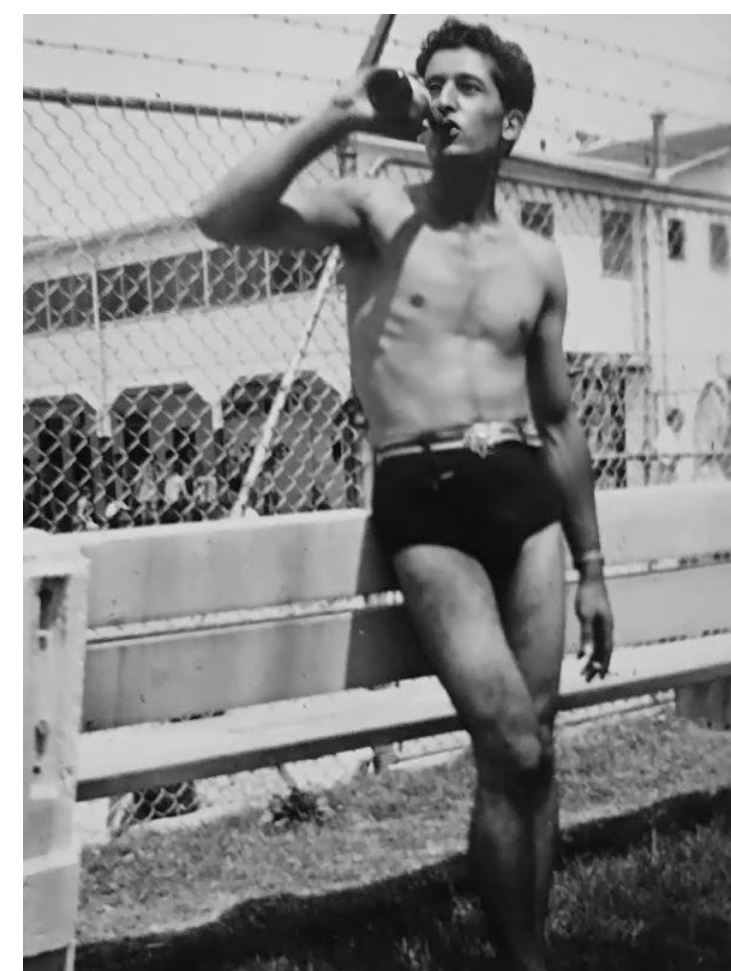
John holding his daughter Despina, back in the United States. (Nick Stargu Archive)



The Stork in flight during a mission in the MTO (National Archives)



John pose holding the 50 caliber machine gun in the waist gunner position. (Nick Stargu Archive)



John enjoying his cold beer at Squadron picnic near the pool, June 1945. (Nick Stargu Archive)

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### SOURCES

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